

# Meeting Needs with Synthetic Turf

C. Leroy Lawson, Jr.

In today's ever changing world where cell phones and computers have become common household items, so too has the business of athletic field building changed to meet the needs of its users. Synthetic turf applications are rapidly growing across the country. Why? Reasons vary, but some of the most common cited include the ability to maximize field usage, the perceived and often real need for fewer maintenance inputs, and the fact that synthetic fields are an alternative to natural grass fields where drought and water restrictions are prevalent; although, the application of irrigation water is often recommended to reduce the surface temperature of synthetic fields.

While synthetic turf is not for everyone, it definitely has a place in the athletic field market. Once a decision to go with synthetic turf is made, there are several items that owners must take into consideration. Owners must assess the situation and determine their needs. What will be the use of the field? What sports will be played on the field? This will determine certain criteria such as dimensions of

the field, the type of synthetic turf that best fits the application, and the markings on the field to accommodate the desired sports. Location must also be considered. Where will we build the field? Site choice is very crucial. The site and soils present must be tested. Geological testing must be done on the site to ensure that the site can support the desired field. The site must be size appropriate to accommodate the type of field desired. The soil quality of the site is also an important factor that can affect budgets. The soil makes up the sub base, which is the foundation for the base to follow. The overall field is only as good as the base underneath. Having certified engineers and architects on board is also another great idea. These qualified professionals can help work with both owners and contractors to make certain that the finished product will satisfy the needs at hand.

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Which turf do we need for our field? There are several synthetic companies in the industry. The owner should meet with various different companies and discuss their needs. The owner should also visit previous projects done by the companies represented to help with this decision. The owner then must pick a particular synthetic company to surface their field. Once a decision to build a synthetic field is made, the actual construction process can begin.

Base construction is the most integral part of the process. The base should exceed the life of the turf. Unfortunately, several synthetic fields have base failures due to settling of the sub base and erosion of improperly designed and constructed bases. How does one avoid such a pitfall? Make certain all the leg work is done prior to beginning the project. Do all of the necessary geological testing and make certain the site is suitable to support the desired field.

## What else can be done to ensure a quality finished product?

### **HIRE A QUALIFIED BASE CONTRACTOR!**

Some things that need to be considered when choosing a qualified base contractor are as follows: How many years

have the base contractor has been in business? How many synthetic bases has the contractor constructed? Make the contractor provide an acceptable reference list and check as many of these references as possible. It is highly recommended that owners visit previous base install projects of their base contractor in addition to or in conjunction with the synthetic turf projects mentioned above.

Once you are certain you have a qualified base contractor, the process can proceed. Base construction basically consists of all steps necessary to prepare the field for the synthetic company to come in and install their product. The steps though reasonably simple are very important to the finished product. The finished product will mirror the base.

Once a site has been chosen and the geological testing of the site has been completed and approved, the base contractor can come in and construct the base for the synthetic surface. The base contractor will come in and strip the site. The base contractor will then cut and fill where necessary to level the site. The base contractor will then laser grade the site, install appropriate drainage, lay down

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a geo-textile fabric to separate the base from the sub base, and then construct the base. The base shall consist of proper sized stones and fine grading to achieve desired drainage. Stone selection is crucial to the project. The stones comprise the base. They are important for the drainage of the field and the finished base product. The stones used shall have gone through a sieve analysis to ensure proper drainage of the base. "Shock pads" are sometimes used. This is a product that lies between the base and the actual carpet to absorb shock.

Once the base is complete, the synthetic turf company will come in and complete the project by installing the chosen synthetic surface on the field. The carpet is rolled out and seamed together. This is usually done by using adhesives or sewing. Once the carpet is laid, the infill is added. The infill is usually an all rubber product or a rubber/silica sand mixture.

## Play begins.

### In summary, the steps include:

Determine needs

Choose site and make certain site can support desired field

Choose synthetic turf company

## CHOOSE QUALIFIED BASE CONTRACTOR

Build Field

Play

Maintain

As stated earlier, the perceived and often real need for fewer management inputs is one of the reasons owners cite to select a synthetic turf field. Although less maintenance is generally required for synthetic fields compared to natural turfgrass fields, there are still maintenance requirements that must be executed to extend the life of a finished synthetic turf field. These maintenance requirements include (but are not limited to): removal of debris, brushing and dragging to re-distribute infill product, and spot cleaning to take care of biological spills.

With all things considered, the choice basically lies with the owners.

What are your needs?

Does a synthetic turf application work for you?

### Reference

American Sports Builders Association

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